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An Islamic Perspective on Knowledge, Knowing, and Methodology

Christopher Darius Stonebanks

For many who are the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves to North America, the setting of parents espousing the intellectual and cultural contributions of their motherland to their adopted society is commonplace. For example, we have seen it represented by Canadian television and film artists such as Mike Myers and Nia Vardalos, each comically recounting (within an American context) their childhood experiences of endlessly being reminded by their respective Scottish and Greek “cinema parents” that everything of value came from their “home country.” Much was the same in my household, where my mother’s fairly constant observations that *everything* originates from Iran came to a zenith when she declared over dinner that bagpipes were invented in Persia and brought to Scotland by the Romans. This announcement was met with explosive laughter and followed by a humbling referral to sources she carefully laid out and an open-ended corroboration from our home encyclopedia; a publication that we often joked, from her interpretation, must have been a “Persian edition.” Although my mother had partial support of the leather-bound tome, there was a strange disconnect between what my mother knew about the contributions of her people to the current knowledge base of North America and the kind of information that was being disseminated to us within formal and nonformal places of education. In the Middle Eastern immigrant experience, most of us have heard, to some extent, the names of Averoes, Avicenna, and/or Khayyam, some with greater connection to Islam than others, which are usually put forward to educate children of the contributions of their heritage to their new home. Most of the references we hear are set in the past, like in the opening of Tariq Ali’s (1997) *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, foreshadowing the silencing of a diverse civilization and narrating the destruction of centuries of learning and experiences within the Muslim culture. What remains from the past is a current silencing of Muslim knowledge or, more pertinent to this chapter, ways of knowing and the humanizing voices that derive from them.

Like many other pieces on the subject of Islam or Muslims, for instance, 5 minutes into the PBS (Kikim Media and Unity Productions Fdnt, 2002) biography on the Prophet Muhammad or five paragraphs into Armstrong’s (2001) biography of the Prophet Muhammad, it takes little time until the direction sways to mention the politics and history that surround the atrocious act of 9/11, and it has taken me just under 400 words until I am obligated to do the same. For many in the “West,” the effects of 9/11 have been a tragedy that has been often referred to as having “forever changed the world.” For many Muslims, it was not only a tragedy but a signal of continued misunderstanding of their faith, ways of knowing, and indeed their very humanity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004). These are methodological, ontological, and epistemological concerns that go beyond the Hollywood/mass media academic/ivory-tower stereotypes of the navel-gazing graduate students pondering “what exists, do I exist?” questions; rather, there is an urgency to this chapter as it is framed not only in the concerns of Freire and Said of dehumanizing the other but in the current and escalating global crisis between “East and West” as well. What’s more, some readers may be put off at the connection that this chapter makes between education, Muslim ways of knowing, qualitative research, and politics, with the last item being

disturbing for those teachers who believe schools to be free of political leaning. In brief, I am of the Freirian belief that “education is politics” (Shor & Pari, 1999), and for those who doubt this, North American examples can be found from Native residential schooling to the increase of science and math in the classrooms after the 1957 launch of *Sputnik*. Educators must increasingly ask themselves, “What and whose politics am I teaching in my class and to what end?”

For the sake of clarity in an era of “axis of evil”-like statements, let me elucidate on some terminology used within this chapter that discusses Muslim ways of knowing and voice. Although I will be using concepts such as “East” and “West,” I do so only for the sake of simplifying the already challenging discussion. However, I still maintain that the idea of an Eastern World, Western World, Muslim World, or “an ‘Arab World,’ perhaps floating around somewhere between Venus and Jupiter” (Stonebanks, 2004) is divisive language that creates a “not of this world” or, perhaps better, “not of *our* world” mind-set and unwittingly or not plays into the dominant American political neoconservative-Straussian ideology of Western society building through the self-affirmation of “us” versus “them” (Drury, 1999; Norton, 2004), as well as some Islamic fundamentalists who forward the belief of “Westoxification.” Similarly, the repeated message that “Allah” is the Arabic word for God or “The only God” is often lost in North America as “Allah” is often used with the intent of creating a division between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. As my primary language of communication is English, I will use the word *God*. There is also the variance of using “Qur'an” or “Koran;” I will use “Qur'an” as it “reflects the correct Arabic transliteration and pronunciation of the word” (Abdul-Haleem, 2004, pp. xxvi–xxvii). Finally, as Hasan (2005) judiciously writes, “After invoking the name of God or the Prophet Mohammad, Muslims usually say a blessing. For God, Muslims say ‘*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*,’ which means ‘Praise the Lord.’ For Muhammad, Muslims say, ‘*Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*,’ which means ‘Peace be upon him.’ I have left these blessings out in the text of this book in order to prevent the non-Muslim reader from becoming confused.” She then continues by writing, “I encourage Muslim readers to say these blessings to themselves as they read along” (p.vii), and I encourage you, before you continue reading, and if it is your belief, to do the same.

In this chapter, I will briefly investigate the dilemma of identity and voice construction of Muslim people, within the mind of the West, from the past to the present, which continues to be profoundly influenced and projected through the master narrative of misconceptions, misrepresentations, and dehumanization. Lindemann Nelson (2001) advocates the use of “counterstory” narratives when working with groups who are dealing with damaged identities, noting that identity is “understood as a complicated interaction of one’s sense of self and others understanding of who one is” (p. xi). In this framework, the counternarrative is used to empower and repair group and individual damaged identities that have derived from the dominant group constructs of identities of certain people through their socially shared narratives or master narratives. To repair the damaging narratives, Lindemann Nelson calls for oppressed groups to confront the master narratives by developing their own, thereby becoming “narrative acts of insubordination” (p. 8). Considering this, if the desire is to truly develop counternarratives that are authentic to the richness, oneness, and diversity of Islam, before examining this quandary that faces our classrooms, theory and methodology must be considered in relation to the Muslim experience and knowledge—specifically carrying out research that is ethically just and following the way of the Prophet Muhammad, beneficial to the Ummah (as a global Muslim community

and collective consciousness, including those Muslims living in diaspora). This is a perspective on theory and methodology development that advocates against the popular perception of Muslim ways of knowing as being set within a backward-looking reaction to a Western concept of modernism and enlightenment that is monolithic, antimodern, premodern, and/or irrational, rather insisting that Muslim “ways of knowing” are both complex and diverse. Much of our formal and nonformal sources of education in the West promote the position that an achievable knowledge that is both universal and unbiased is fundamentally a product of the European mind, whereas Indigenous knowledge is mired in such descriptors as backward, one-dimensional, quaint, and ultimately inferior (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). In this environment, Muslim perspectives are reduced in many forums to that of the irrational monolith as opposed to intellectual contributions that should be weighed on individual merit and balanced with the Muslim collective experience.

With the understanding of the variation and connections between Islam, the religion; Muslims, the followers of Islam; the cultural association of being born of and/or within the context of a family and/or community belonging to that which is associated with the Islamic faith and/or Muslim culture and the many variations of individuals and/or groups that are self-described or defined by others as Muslim, I connect Muslim ways of knowing to Indigenous ways of knowing primarily through the shared relationship with the ongoing experiences of colonialism and imperialism. It is important to note that, as Choudry (2006) writes, we must “frame Indigenous Peoples’ struggles in an understanding of rights to self-determination in the context of ongoing colonialism, rather than viewing colonialism as a historical event” (p. 1). The history and current unequal relationship that has developed and continues to arise through colonialism and imperialism does indeed frame the Indigenous experience and is a current circumstance (Smith, 1999). This is a shared experience between many peoples that has not stopped at physical, ethnic, cultural, or religious borders, as can be made evident from many Indigenous people’s use of Said’s (1978) concept of “Other,” for instance, examining the past and present Aboriginal experiences within North America compared to one’s own Middle Eastern Indigenous understandings.

With this in mind, I contend that although I recognize that Muslim ways of knowing are both deeply connected and guided by Islam, within the divergences of Muslim voices, they cannot be understood apart from historical analysis, contextual perspectives, and, notwithstanding its diversity, a continually changing and emergent collective consciousness, much of which has stemmed from the experience of colonialism and imperialism. In this chapter, I invite the educator, Muslim or non-Muslim, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, who is interested in the use of exploring critical research to become a part of the dialogue in creating methodologies that can reflect Muslim ways of knowing and develop desperately needed humanizing voices in order to build a transformative classroom for social justice. In effect, I suggest that all educators endeavor to be teacher-researchers (Kincheloe, 2003).

Teacher as Researcher

As educators and qualitative researchers, we have a moral obligation to provide an avenue to allow the

legitimate and free narrative of Muslim people (a significant population not only in a global sense but within North America), to be understood and heard within our society and provide a path to the diversity that exists while acknowledging the presence of the growing, diversely ethnic Muslim collective consciousness and knowledge. This obligation is forwarded with the intention of promoting Freire's transformative classroom, in which recognition of Muslim ways of knowing in our schools will lead to a critical consciousness that moves away from dehumanizing. My hope is to build upon Semali and Kincheloe's (1999) "belief in the transformative power of Indigenous knowledge" and examine "the ways that such knowledge can be used to foster empowerment and justice in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 15). Teachers are in a unique position in our society to be at the forefront of such transformation and have the ability through their own classrooms to be actively conscious of social injustices, carry out research, and, with their students, work toward positive change (Kincheloe, 2003). The possibilities are present, and it is up to the individual educator to decide to what degree he or she wishes to be an agent of reproduction (realizing, of course, there are many positive elements of our society we *do* want to reproduce) or transformation (realizing, of course, there are many negative elements of our society we *do not* want to reproduce). In regard to the subject matter of this chapter, the first step toward creating the transformative classroom is to identify the negative imagery that silences Muslim perspectives and diminishes their presence and ways of knowing in schools.

I write this chapter with the hope of inspiring the teacher, in the spirit of Freire and the "teacher-researcher" (Kincheloe, 2003), who places importance on discovering the educational path her or his class should take despite and/or because of the dehumanization and miseducation that is prevalent in regards to Islam, as religion, culture, and people. My interests lie in perspective, voice, identity, and how they connect to ways of knowing. Especially as they relate to the educational context of the relationship between the student and schools, including the hidden and explicit aspects of curriculum (Apple, 2004) that place greater and lesser importance on differing sets of knowledge, the development and implementation of value-laden policies (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997), and the conscious, unconscious, and/or dysconscious miseducation (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004; King, 1991) that occurs in both our formal and nonformal locations of North American "learning." All of these issues have an impact on the identity of the minority student and his or her ability to comfortably and safely forward his or her narrative and ways of knowing within these settings.

Within the current global context, these areas of investigation have taken greater meaning for Muslim youth, especially those in the already significant and growing diaspora, as they struggle to define meaning in self, their religion, way of life, community, and knowledge all the while being bombarded with a multitude of multimedia entertainment images (Shaheen, 1984, 1991, 2001), a news media (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting [FAIR], 2001), and an education system (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004) that consistently controls and dictates the portrayal of Islamic faith and Muslim culture and people in a negative manner. I write this chapter because all of which I have written has been a part of my own experience as well as the experience of many Muslim children I have observed attending schools in North America. In effect, like many others who write about Indigenous and/or epistemological issues, I acknowledge my own voice within the text.

"Value-free research is impossible" (Denzin, 1989, p. 23) was the motto during my graduate studies at

Concordia University's Department of Education in the early and mid-1990s. Many of my professors at the time encouraged the principles of Denzin (1989) and Eisner (1990) and the idea that acknowledging one's values and subjectivity within one's research allowed greater understanding to the reader. The idea that all researchers, whether they be professional or student, bring their preconceived notions, prior knowledge, culture, and/or theoretical leanings on the subject to be studied with them has become understood, and researchers are acknowledging this by revealing their background to their readers so that the textual experience will be that much richer, of course, being mindful of not falling into the trap "of simply saying, 'But enough about you, let me tell you about me'" (Apple, 1996, p.xiv). In past writing, I have welcomed the reader to an insight of who I, as the author of the text, am (Stonebanks, 2004, 2008), and the forthcoming narrative, I hope, also adds to this disclosure within my research.

In many ways, stemming from my own experiences, this piece of writing is my exploration to encourage that methodology respects Islam and the variety of Muslim people's perspectives on knowledge and knowing. In presenting his own relationship with Islam, Said (2002) explained, "True, I was born in the Muslim world, and culturally my Christian Arab Palestinian parents grew up steeped, as every Arab was, in Muslim culture" (p. 69). Said connects culture with religion, and in my own life experience, growing up with relatives who were, in their multiplicities of approaches and commitments, Muslim also steeped me in this culture. This is as inescapable as being exposed to Christian culture in the West; one becomes "steeped" in the culture and the people with and/or without conscious effort. In this spirit, then, it should also be noted that despite my own education and teaching regarding or relating to religion, in light of those who truly dedicate their lives to the specific studies of Islam, I am by no means part of the very elite group that are experts on the Qur'an.

He created man from a clinging form. (96: 2, the Qur'an, translated by Abdul-Haleem, 2004)

Human embryology, botany, and astronomy are some of the many revelations renowned to be found within the Qur'an, and the depth and breadth of Islamic scholarship dedicated to pursuing this knowledge is far too vast to do it justice within the brief scope of this chapter and beyond my comprehension of the Qur'an. Reading the Qur'an leaves me baffled by its wealth, appreciative of its teachings, and, above all, when appropriate time permits, encouraged to return to it. Often, when I reach a point of contemplation or confusion while reading the Qur'an, I turn to biographical accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and, in reading about his life, the context of his living and his actions; I gain greater appreciation of the Qur'an. Like many others in search of possible truths and meanings, I am a neophyte. I am also, among many other things, an educator, a qualitative researcher, and a person born of Iranian and European parents, raised in North America and painfully aware of the West's profoundly negative comprehension of Islam, Muslims, Iran, the Middle East, and their cultures. With an understanding of the presence of subjectivity in any research, I acknowledge that the experiences of being "half and half" (O'Hearn, 1998) place the perspectives of this writing firmly within this context. Much of this chapter stems from living in these two cultures and recognizing that the voices we (both Muslim and non-Muslim), in the West, hear in regard to Islam are, for the most part, harmful. For Muslim narratives to begin to enter the collective consciousness of the West, we must develop methodologies that value the knowledge of Muslims for the research to be truthful, ethical, and, in the way

of the Prophet Muhammad, beneficial to the Ummah (again, as a global Muslim community and collective consciousness, including those Muslims living in diaspora). Having said this, perhaps in the current contexts of allegations of “axis of evil,” “evil doers,” and “holy wars,” more people should partake on the journey of discovery instead of living in the vacuum of extremes that has led to unethical representations and actions. With this in mind, I forward my own narrative of my experience with Islam as an example of developing ethical counternarrative voices that benefit our communities.

Narrative: *Mamanjoon*

My most vivid early childhood memories of summer take place in Iran. More specifically, in a district of Tehran called Niavaran, which, at the time in the early to mid-1970s, can be described as a dichotomy between affluent homes, containing lush gardens and opulent pools surrounded by high walls, and the modest two- or three-storied apartment complexes and empty fields that filled the expanses between the prosperous residences. It is hard to explain the sharp contrasts to your senses as you step from outside the high gates, the flowers, the tall fruit trees, the freshly sprayed stoned walkways, the splashes of jumping goldfish, the gentle chiming of metal spoons against tea-filled glass, the familiar and soothing but mostly incomprehensible song of adults speaking Farsi into the dry streets, the humble homes, the sandy fields, and, if you were lucky, the passing children, their recognizable laughter and chatter, who shared your features and part of your heritage but were separated from you by language and a long-established social status you knew nothing about. Outside the walls, a longing, excitement, uncertainty, and wonder; inside the walls, a sense of belonging, boredom, family, security, and love. My mother took my siblings and me to Iran on a regular basis, and the central focus of that trip was our *mamanjoon*, our grandmother.

Memories of *mamanjoon* were also filled with sensations; warm touches, gentle smiles, and, of course, comforting smells associated with cooking. We were separated by language but that did not stop her from talking to me. An aged frame moving from task to task, she would maintain a continuous private conversation with me, periodically interjecting laughter after the recognizable linguistic pattern took the form of questioning or statement making. Already in her eighties when I became cognizant, she was a central role model in my life as I'm sure she was to all of my immediate family. She would project a feeling of absolute love for you despite the cultural and language differences, and, for my part, nothing symbolized this more than when I would watch her pray.

Although the schedule of her prayer customs was lost on me at the time, in retrospect I can remember her being quite diligent about quietly slipping away from the family to prepare herself to commit her faith to God. Of course, for a child raised in the northern climate of Canada, afternoons were not a time of prayer, reflection, or rest—rather, a time to play before the impending setting sun set off your parents' instincts for the routine of bedtime preparation. In the hot sun of Tehran, I would resist my mother's and aunt's insistence for naptime and would myself sneak away to continue trying to find something to amuse myself within the solitude of those walls, and in that pursuit I would often and consistently find *mamanjoon* in prayer.

Some of the images have been clouded over time, most significantly the meticulously noted step-by-step movements and process of prayer as spoken in the Qur'an were, I'm certain, faithfully adhered to in her ritual. Even the recital of her prayers was lost to me, as I unfortunately did and do not speak Arabic, nor was the importance of her words ever translated for me. For my part, I cannot authentically reproduce in the written word what *mamanjoon* achieved every day as testament to faith, based on her years of practice, experience, and learning. What I can speak about are the memories that have endured and the relationship we had while she prayed. It is difficult to describe the dignity and serenity of watching your grandmother pray. As a child who was not accustomed to the practice, save the occasions I saw my aunt pray, it seemed an event solely devised between her and God. Growing up in a Christian community and school system, but not as a Christian, I knew enough to understand she was communicating with God, but the tradition itself did not have the greater societal connection to me than, let's say, the neighborhood showing up for the annual elementary school Christmas concert (where I would habitually be cast in the role of cowering shepherd dressed in my bathrobe). For some reason, I don't remember seeking out my grandmother; however, it would seem that, at least once a day, I would always turn a corner and find her in prayer. Kneeling on her small Persian carpet and quietly reciting, she would be wrapped in the traditional Iranian chador that would frame her face, emphasizing her beauty, devotion, and age. Even with her eyes closed, she knew I was there, but she would not break from the ritual. I would watch passively for a short time, watch her hands go up and then down, then stand up and kneel back down and, from the kneeling position, bow her head and touch her forehead to her praying stone, or what I recently found out from my mother is called a *mohr*. I would lie down on my stomach directly in front of the *mohr* and quietly watch her, trying to be respectful, but too restless to understand what could possibly be more important than her grandchild. Most of the time, I would try and make eye contact with her, keeping pace with her movements and noticing how she would keep her eyes closed. Invariably, the *mohr* itself would grab my attention and I would start pushing it around the carpet, patting it back and forth and sliding it between my hands like a cartoon kitten playing with a ball of yarn.

In the kneeling position, she would continue her soft recitation, now aware that I had probably picked up the *mohr* and was examining it more closely, perhaps imagining what it was made of or what function it could personally serve. The prayer and movements would continue; the once relaxed eyes were now kept closed with concentration, and the crease lines became more pronounced. Her recitation became more well defined, and at the corner of her mouth curved a slight smile and one eye slightly opened to see where her *mohr* had now been placed by her unknowing grandchild. Again in the kneeling position, her hand would gently come out and try and locate the *mohr*, touching the carpet in hopes it had been returned to proper proximity. The words would continue, her eyes more open as she would see the *mohr* in my hand and try and time her prayers to reach out to take back her praying stone and return it to its rightful place. More often than not, with her concentration broken, you would find her kneeling on the carpet with her hands on her knees, laughing while simultaneously chastising me in a language I could not fully understand for once again disturbing her prayer. Always gently and tenderly, the *mohr* would be taken from my hand, and the immediacy, but not the loving tone, of her voice would signal that it was time for me to leave her to her prayers.

For many years, this was the face and spirit of Muslims in my mind; a caring and loving grandmother in prayer

who would patiently endure the distraction of her half-Iranian, half-European grandson. Years later, when I would fondly recall these episodes with my mother, she would reveal that the encounters had even greater significance given the importance the Shiites place on undisturbed prayer. Patience, love, and a word that has escaped the Canadian debate on multiculturalism that stands higher than “tolerance” describe this woman of the Islamic faith. Despite the Western portrayal of Muslims during and after the Iranian Revolution, the most recent Intifada, the Reaganera conflicts with the Middle East, Gulf War I, and many more, *mamanjoon* was the personal narrative I would share that described Islam. Given the opportunity to write about Indigenous knowledge, this is where I would have wanted to take the dialogue on voice, narrative, and ways of knowing. If she were in front of me, I'd ask her for her story, I'd ask her why did she demonstrate such love for this grandchild, who was half European, was not being brought up as Muslim, did not speak Farsi, did not share many of her customs, had no understanding of her history, and did not even know how inappropriate it was to interrupt her daily prayers. What created such affection and tolerance in her? Was it learned from her own family? Was it the teaching that was provided to her from God through the Prophet Muhammad? This is the voice I would want to know more about, to share; however, in the current context, I do not think I am at liberty to let a narrative like this stand on its own. In the flurry of negative responses and sentiments toward those who were perceived as being Muslim, Arab, Middle Eastern, or the wide categories and descriptors that were associated with being part of that Other (Said, 1985) belonging to those who committed 9/11, my response, for a time, was to describe my grandmother. Without even being able to communicate with me, as far as I was concerned, she was the picture of Muslims and the reflection of living life as taught by the Prophet Muhammad. Some would listen, but in a time when even the most educated and well meaning still refer to Muslims as “Muhammadans,” many would have nothing to do with a gentle, tolerant, and loving descriptor of the religion, its people, and the culture. In effect, what I *knew*, what I *lived* about Islam, its people, its history, was and still is not acceptable dialogue or way of knowing in the post-9/11 climate where the distortion of the Other and consequently the Muslim sense of self continues to worsen in both formal and nonformal locations of education.

Distortion of Humanity

I maintain that if pedagogy involves issues of knowledge production and transmission, the shaping of values, and construction of subjectivity, then popular culture is the most powerful pedagogical force in contemporary America. (Steinberg, 2004, p.173)

Steinberg (2004) writes of Muslims being Hollywood's enduring “desert minstrels,” relegated to film characters that are ignorant, scheming, violent, or silent, and notes the profound influence that media have on shaping perspective and consciousness. Teachers, television, movies, comic books, parents, peers, and more all play an important part of ascribing and/or confirming how one sees oneself and how one should view others. As a minority student, it was painfully obvious that this relationship was unequal, especially considering the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s had virtually no popular media that tackled issues of “Middle Eastern,” South, or West Asian racism and oppression. The only representations we saw of ourselves were predominantly

negative (Shaheen, 1984, 1991, 2001). the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) published a report in 2005 summarizing the Canadian media portrayal of Muslims in 2003. Using the term *image distortion disorder*, coined by physician LeNoir, to explain how “most of the images that one ethnic group has of another are developed by the media” (Lenoir, as cited in Solomon, 2002), the CIC examined the negative effects this has on our society, particularly our Muslim youth.

The distorted perception that Islam condones and encourages violence is largely created by the media and it leads to societal anxiety among Canadians. This is called “image distortion disorder.” Image distortion disorder is particularly dangerous in Canada, with its substantial multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and multi-cultural populations. Among most Canadians who have not knowingly ever met a Muslim in person, there is high likelihood that their perception of Muslim Canadians will be distorted.... Young Muslim Canadians of dark complexion, especially women with hijabs (traditional head coverings), or males with full beards, are particularly vulnerable to anxiety, fear and discrimination because of society's perception that their religion is violent, backward, restrictive, fundamentalist, and intolerant of opposing or alternative viewpoints. (CIC, 2005)

From disparaging accusations from North America's popular punditry and leaders regarding the Prophet Muhammad to the political and media-frenzied prelude to Gulf War II, Muslims have struggled to have their voices and perspectives heard or reflected within the public setting and popular mediums. The media shape our view of Islam and the Muslim people (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004), and whatever little doubt of their power and the scope of their message they could sell to the West that should have left us after the first Gulf War was put on the market through the provocative image conjuring—false narratives of Arab soldiers killing babies brought to us with the help of the public relations firm Hill and Knowlton (MacArthur, 2004). Regan's (2002) account of his brother's reaction to this “news” echoes the many responses I witnessed from peers when, at the time of Gulf War I, I was completing my undergraduate degree.

More than 10 years later, I can still recall my brother Sean's face. It was bright red. Furious. Not one given to fits of temper, Sean was in an uproar. He was a father, and he had just heard that Iraqi soldiers had taken scores of babies out of incubators in Kuwait City and left them to die. the Iraqis had shipped the incubators back to Baghdad. A pacifist by nature, my brother was not in a peaceful mood that day. “We've got to go and get Saddam Hussein. Now,” he said passionately. (Regan, 2002)

Absent from the postwar dialogue and counternarrative, at least in the larger collective consciousness of the West, was that these incidents never occurred and were fabricated to play upon not only the sympathies of the West but their bigotries as well. Yes, as MacArthur (2004) notes, there were some dissenting voices that pierced the cacophony of outrage, but they usually appeared buried “on page 13” (p.67). I too remember pointing to newspaper pieces refuting or correcting the initial claims of Iraqi soldiers killing babies that appeared in the back pages, tightly worded documents with little of the value-filled descriptors and inflammatory language that existed in the original news pieces that drove us to war, but it had little impact on the twenty-something age group, non-Muslim, non-Middle Eastern friends I showed them to. The usual

reaction was, “what’s done is done” or “Well, Saddam was a bad man.” From an Eastern perspective, the sense of confusion and anger over this page in history is augmented given that, as MacArthur points out, “This is not to say that babies did not perish by removal from their incubators during the Gulf War” (p.76). MacArthur quotes an article from the *New York Times* where a Dr. Qasm Ismail, director of Baghdad's Saddam Pediatric Hospital, recounts the first night of the allied bombardment. The doctor describes “the panic that ensued from the explosions and loss of electricity” (p. 76).

Mothers grabbed their children out of incubators, took intravenous tubes out of their arms.... Others were removed from oxygen tents, and they ran to the basement, where there was no heat. I lost more than 40 prematures in the first 12 hours of the bombing. (MacArthur, 2004, p. 76)

Many of us with roots in the East wondered, “Where is the outrage, and when exactly is it all right to kill babies?” MacArthur's (2004) book, *Second Front*, chronicles the buildup to both Gulf Wars and the complicity of the media to repeat what their government (in the case of Gulf War I, Canada should be included) provided to them. The fact that this occurs within our Western societies should not be a shock to anyone who has even paid the slightest of attention to Chomsky and Herman's (1988) *Manufacturing Consent*, in that public approval and information are manufactured through a continuous and repetitive barrage of images and facts that are controlled by the agreement and approval of the privileged. What is perhaps more concerning is that much of this plays off the racism that exists in the Western collective consciousness against Muslims. the Program on International Policy Attitudes' (2003) study on *Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War* revealed that misperceptions derived through the news media contributed significantly to the American public's positive support for the war. Respondents to the research were taken from a randomly selected U.S. nationwide poll, and we can assume that people who work in education would also be part of this survey. Teachers, like any other member of our North American community, are not exempt from these powers of persuasion, and they, in return, reflect what they have consumed to their classroom. In Canada, knowing the extensive access to American news media, we are not free from this power of perception making, and being aware of the influence is essential in a democracy given the possible outcomes. As I write this chapter, more than 2, 700 American soldiers have died (*The Washington Post*, October 2006), the minimum amount of Iraqi civilian deaths are numbered conservatively at 43, 850 (<http://Iraqibodycount.com>, October 2006) to the staggering number of 655,000 (Burnham, Lafta, Doocy, & Roberts, 2006), we have no idea how many Iraqi soldiers have died, and the number of innocent civilian Afghanis that have been killed is difficult to access and confirm given the prevailing North American government stance on the subject.

Gen. Tommy Franks, the top officer in the U.S. Central Command for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, summed up the American military's attitude when he told reporters during the Afghan campaign, “We don't do body counts.” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News Online, 2005)

Given these lost lives, it seems imperative that as educators, we not contribute to perpetuating miseducation; rather, we should create solutions that create dialogue and understanding of the East, as well as provide an atmosphere where the Middle Eastern/Muslim/American/Canadian student is safely allowed to promote his or her perspectives and promote a curriculum that values or, at the very least, makes room for their

Indigenous knowledge. The challenge is not an easy one, as the current conditions in the West make this difficult to promote. However, the danger in not addressing these dilemmas is admitting complacency in some of the worst aspects of social reproduction, contributing to stereotypes, prejudice, and the silencing of counterperspectives.

Researcher's Preconception

The challenge to develop legitimate Muslim counternarratives in the West is even more daunting considering Vakily (2001) notes that methodological approaches to the study of Islam have been problematic due to the lack of objectivity on the part of the researchers, most of whom come from a Christian background. I take the use of "Christian background" in the sense that the researcher does not have to be a practicing Christian, per se, but raised and educated in an environment where Christianity is the unquestioned norm. In this atmosphere, the researcher is not only exposed to an experience that validates his or her own religious affiliations but, if not overtly taught against, can develop misconceptions over others. It is an ongoing process that Steinberg (2004) asserts prepares the Western collective consciousness for a distortion of the "Middle Eastern" or Muslim into the "bogeyman" (Abukhattala, 2004) and is persuasive enough to affect the researcher. Armstrong (2001) observes in the first paragraph in her book, *Muhammad, a Biography of the Prophet*, "For some time, I had been disturbed by the prejudice against Islam that I so frequently encountered, even in the most liberal and tolerant circles" (p.11). Rogerson's (2003) biography of the Prophet Muhammad weaves a narrative that is both humanizing and inspiring of the Prophet's life. Although Rogerson's respectful admiration of the Prophet Muhammad stems from, what he calls "a good story" (p. 3) (and it should be noted that Rogerson does mean story in the narrative sense and not in the fictional manner), he acknowledges that it is a narrative that is vilified in the West:

Try drawing a picture of a man wrapped in a cloak and lost in thought and introducing it to a classroom of schoolchildren or at a pub quiz night. Ask who it is meant to be, and what do you get? Dracula, Darth Vader or a Dark Rider from the *Lord of the Rings*. If you add a turban, the picture will most probably be taken for that of a wicked vizier or a Barbary pirate. Within Islam, however, he represents almost everything of human value. (p. 3)

The distorted image of the Prophet Muhammad, the very one often referred to by Muslims as "the perfect man," goes hand in hand with the West's distorted perspectives of the way he led his life as well. In September 2002, the politically influential Pat Robertson on Fox news said the following about the Prophet Muhammad: "This man was an absolute wild-eyed fanatic. He was a robber and a brigand. And to say that these terrorists distort Islam, they're carrying out Islam." If, as Bloom's (2005) writing so convincingly states, the American construct of (the Prophet or the Christians' the Lord) Jesus represents, among other things, someone who is "known intimately, as friend and comforter" (p. 25), then the West's creation of the Prophet Muhammad is the polar opposite. The September 2005 Danish *Jyllands-Posten* publication of the cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad is a current example of the double standard of representation as the newspaper in 2003 refused

to publish cartoons lampooning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, responding to the artist who submitted the work, "I don't think *Jyllands-Posten's* readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think that they will provoke an outcry. Therefore, I will not use them" (Fouché, 2006). Incidents such as this occurred frequently during the buildup to both Gulf wars and the war in Afghanistan (often forgotten is the civilian death toll in Afghanistan that has superseded the tragedy of 9/11), with media and pundits misrepresenting Islam, its people, and its history while manufacturing consent for great suffering of Muslim people and denying their voice. Said (1998) observes that since the eras of European (and North American) colonialism and imperialism, when tensions grew between the West and *their* Islam, social and humanistic sciences, with their "objectivity" and "scientific impartiality," were used to cover their "deep-seated" prejudices about Islam and Muslim people: "In such a context both science and direct violence end up by being forms of aggression against Islam" (p. 7).

This is not to suggest that the dilemma of engaging in research reflecting Muslim ways of knowing is problematic only to the Western non-Muslim. Al-Attas (2002) states that through the process of colonization, the Western worldview dominated over the Muslims intellectually. Lamenting this effect, Al-Attas writes, "The dissemination of the basic essentials of the Western world view and its surreptitious consolidation in the Muslim mind was gradually accomplished through the educational system based upon a concept of knowledge and its principles that would ultimately bring about the deislamization of the Muslim mind" (p.114). In response to this dilemma came Al-Attas's call in the late 1970s for the de-Westernization of knowledge.

Considering Theory and Methodology in Relation to the Muslim Knowledge

I venture to maintain that the greatest challenge that has surreptitiously arisen in our age is the challenge of knowledge, indeed, not as against ignorance; but knowledge as conceived and disseminated throughout the world by Western civilization; knowledge whose nature has become problematic because it has lost its true purpose due to being unjustly conceived, and has brought about chaos in man's life instead of, and rather than peace and justice. (Al-Attas, 2002, p.146)

Concentrating on the idea of "objectivity" and "scientific impartiality," the question asked is what has Western research, the researcher himself or herself, done to improve the lives of those being researched. Smith (1999) asks of the researcher, "Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix the generator? Can they actually do anything?" (p. 10). Smith acknowledges that many of the researchers who have worked in Native communities have been well liked but is quick to add that despite the massive amount of research that has been carried out among Indigenous people, few positive results have been seen within the communities, and much is the same in the Muslim communities as well. Drawing upon Said's (1978) concept of an "Othered" representation of the researched, Smith candidly questions the right and motives of non-Indigenous researchers and the relevance of their Euro-centered research methods, in effect questioning the continued use of the

“Orientalist” perspective. Recently, Said (2002) wrote on this subject “that Orientalist learning itself was premised on the silence of the Native ... presenting that unfortunate creature as an undeveloped, deficient, and uncivilized being who couldn't represent himself” (p.71). Although Said observes that some forms of representation regarding certain ethnic/racial groups from Occidental researchers are now considered politically incorrect—for instance, “it has now become inappropriate to speak on behalf of ‘Negroes’” (p.71)—and even though Said calls for the same respect for those who are still considered Others, it has yet to happen. If the hope is for research to benefit the community, then given the current tragedies relating to the Muslim communities, there has been a failing in representation that allows this to continue with very little concerns of humanity.

To develop counternarratives that are going to bring humanity to a people and religion that have been dehumanized, the researchers have to make a paramount step and ask themselves if they can account for their spirit and heart, ask themselves if their research is ethical, ask themselves if it pays its due respect to the beliefs relating to Islam, ask themselves whether it accounts for the context of the Muslim experience, and, finally, ask themselves if it is beneficial to the Ummah. This approach does not necessitate that researchers be experts in theology; rather, it requests that they venture into the counternarrative free of their own possible miseducation and be open to another way of knowing. Central to Freire's humanization through liberatory dialogue is the concept of humility; Freire (2005) writes, “How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?” (p. 90). Continuing on this idea, Freire clarifies that upon a dialogue, neither are “utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting together, to learn more than they now know” (p. 90). Akin to Freire's sentiments, within Abdul-Haleem's (2004) “Introduction” of his translation of the Qur'an, he discusses the many misinterpretations the West has had of Islam and turns to the Qur'an for the basis of interfaith dialogue:

The Qur'an forbids arguing with the people of the Book, except in the best ways and urges Muslims to say: “We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]” (29: 46). God addresses Muslims, Jews, and Christians with the following: “We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but he wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about” (5: 48)... These are explicit statements which Muslims involved in interfaith dialogue must rely on. (p. xxxv)

From Abdul-Haleem's interpretation, the Qur'an requires the approach one takes to dialogue with non-Muslims to be open, tolerant, ethical, and respectful. For the Muslim and non-Muslim researcher alike, if humanizing voices of Islam are going to pierce the predominant collective consciousness of the West, then we must enter the dialogue showing humility to the experience and faith of the counternarrative rather than imposing knowledge. Nor is the answer, within this particular ethical context, to attempt to mold the Qu'ran to fit particular theoretical leanings. In fact, as a scholar on Islam, Al-Attas (2002) warns against the haphazard use of quoting the Qur'an as a means of justifying theory: “They futilely attempt to ‘rationalize’ Verses of the

Holy Qur'an they find convenient to their purposes in line with the theories and findings of modern science. Their habit, however, is to remain silent on many of the Verses which in fact cannot be so fathomed and which prove their thinking to be inadequate and confused" (p.131).

In my mind, the ultimate goal of the de-Westernization of knowledge is not to denounce theories and methodologies that have been initiated or reinitiated within a Western context; rather, it is to acknowledge "that knowledge is not neutral" (Al-Attas, 2002, p.146). For some, like Al-Attas, the advancement of theory is encouraged, but along an Islamic framework. For others, the dilemma is easily rationalized that all knowledge is derived from God, so all knowledge is Islamic. Armstrong (2002) notes that "in India the poet philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938) insisted that Islam was just as rational as any Western system. Indeed it was the most rational and advanced of all the confessional faiths. Its strict monotheism had liberated humanity from mythology, and the Quran had urged Muslims to observe nature closely, reflect upon their observations and subject their actions to constant scrutiny. Thus the empirical spirit that had given birth to modernity had in fact originated in Islam" (p. 154). And for the Islamic modernist that Al-Attas warns against, there is (thankfully, in my opinion) "liberal" interpretation of scripture combining theories such as feminism with Islam. Ultimately, in the end, researchers must ask themselves, How do any of these interpretations toward theories or methodologies help the Muslim people? As I negotiate the use of theory and methodology to address this dilemma of dehumanization and counternarratives, I consider both in judgment of my own and other lived experiences.

Theories aside for a moment, for the past 15 years of working in Canadian schools, I have always known that students' identities are profoundly influenced by significant others in their lives. As a student myself, I knew the authority that adults in schools had on children's sense of self and their relationship and place within society. In my attempts to make sense of the Indigenous and minority experience in school, both personal and other, I have found many socio/cultural and qualitative theories that have answered many questions but leave room for many more. As a result, I choose to take Wolcott's (1992) path when it comes to theory and methodology, as he prefers to work "on a gentle theoretical 'plain' where distinguishing features are not so prominent, watersheds not so sharply divided" (p. 10), and in the spirit of Smith's (1999) call to realize that methodologies must be scrutinized in juxtaposition to Indigenous experience and knowledge. With this in mind, and asking myself if, in the end, the theories answer my questions for alleviating the dilemmas that surround the dehumanization and identity construction of Muslims, I have found that a multiple theory approach to both theory and methodologies, all the while contrasting them with respect to indigenous experiences of research, has been revealing.

At the individual level, I have always admired the interactionist theory, which is an interpretative theory that concerns itself primarily with the role of the individual within society. "The social construction of meaning in social interactions" (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p.19) is central to the interactionist perspective. George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley theorized that the genesis of the self is accomplished through the gradually developing ability of a person to take on the role of others and to then visualize his or her own performance from the point of view of others. Briefly, it was the belief of Mead (1934) that the human concept

of “self” was derived through these social acts within a society. This means that we draw much of our identity through the ways others perceive us, just as others are influenced by how we perceive them. One's sense of self is intertwined with society, and the self arises simultaneously with the act of socialization. We can only develop a sense of identity when we understand who others are, so that we can then compare our differences. Cooley (1964) states, “There is no sense of ‘I’ ... without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they” (p. 182) and maintains that there can be no isolates. One's consciousness of self is a reflection of the ideas about himself or herself that he or she attributes to other minds and perceptions. This action is called the “reflected self” or the “looking glass self” (Congalton & Daniel, 1976, p. 136). The reflected self implies that we are all a reflection of how others see us. One's identity is, therefore, foremost derived from others' perception of that individual, just as that of the others is somewhat molded from that first individual's perception of them. What I always felt the interactionist theory fell short on was explaining how one's group ascriptions affected one's sense of self.

At the group level, Fredrick Barth (1999) contends that cultural identity is not only formulated within one's own cultural collection but is also influenced through the defining of perceived differences that are ascribed by those outside of one's group's cultural boundaries. Within the anthropological publication, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth postulates that ethnicity evolves from the union of socially ascribed designation and group self-identification. According to Barth, ethnic identity is decided from both the group's view of itself as well as from how those outside the group view it. Barth states that “ethnic identity is a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction, not the analyst's construct on the basis of his or her construction of a group's ‘culture’” (p. 6). Barth's perspectives are founded in the notion that the boundaries that separate ethnicities are created by cultural differences that are recognized by at least two groups. This means that an ethnic group's cultural identity is formed by the others' perspectives of the group as well. Initially, this then creates an awareness of variation between one's own group and the other, and among groups of equal power, the effects of defining each other based on their perspectives may confirm a group's own perceived identity; however, when the relationship is unbalanced, as is the case with Indigenous groups who have experienced oppression, it may be and usually is stigmatizing.

With the balance and checks of equal power, group identification can be a combination of self and other ascribed identifiers, but in the absence of an equal relationship, the dominant group has a powerful influence on forming and imposing perception. For Indigenous people, group and self-definition changes in the presence of imperialism and colonialism. Many who have researched the subject of Indigenous cultural identity have used Edward Said's concept of “Other” to clarify their perspective. Within Said's (1978, 1994) *Orientalism*, he asserts that the creation of the Other helped define Europe's self-image, thereby having a continued impact on the manner in which the Other—in this case, the Indigenous people of the Middle East—were perceived. As Said proposes the Other, as constructed through the Orientalist gaze, “has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world ...” (p. 12). The formation of identity throughout history and within every society, Said maintains, involves creating opposites and Others. This occurs because “the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*” (pp. 331–332). This is a formation of cultural identity that is developed by one group's perception

of identity over another, which, in this case of a dominant group constructing and defining the picture of a subordinate group, inevitably leads to the positive self-image of one group and the stereotyped negative images of another.

One can only suspect that, in the face of racial prejudice and historic oppression, the ability and desire to find one's authentic selfhood are severely affected by negative images of that self as a racial Other. (Vickers, 1998, p.10)

In regard to similar groups that have experienced colonialism, this becomes an oppression of cultural, religious, and self-identity that Vickers (1998) views as “a guiding mythos of the colonial cultures of white Euramerica ... to destroy the historical identities of Indian cultures and individuals” (Vickers, 1998, p.2). However, imperialist cultural oppression goes far beyond the denial of the Indigenous culture. The rejection of being perceived as “human” has its history as well, and its impact also leaves a heavy scar on cultural identity. In the introduction of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary*, Macedo (2005) writes in response to Freire's mainstream academics accusing him of using jargon-laden language and mused why such criticism was rarely aimed at language, such as “ethnic cleansing,” “smart bombs,” and “theatre of operations,” used by those of privilege and power. The result of which leads to passivity of Western consciousness, and such things as “the mass killing of women, children, and the elderly and the rape of women and girls as young as five years old take on the positive attribute of ‘cleansing,’ which leads us to conjure a reality of ‘purification’ of the ethnic ‘filth’ ascribed to Bosnian Muslims, in particular, and to Muslims the world over, in general” (p.21). We can now add reality-changing terms such as *shock and awe* to the lexicon. Smith (1999) writes, “The struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression” (p. 26). North American news media demonstrate this fact every night, as they pay rightful homage to American/Canadian/British soldiers who die in their “war on terror” but ignore the far, far larger number of Iraqi and Afghani innocent civilian dead. Knowing this, it is far too intrusive and powerful an experience not to leave an impression on one's sense of cultural and religious identity.

All of these theories of identity construction take on greater meaning given the so-called neo-Straussian/conservative influence on Western politics and their need to create and manipulate national unity through a religious shared set of truths and maintenance of that unity through lies, if need be, and exploitation of the fear of the Other (Drury, 1999; Norton, 2004). The followers of Strauss, like Wolfowitz, believe “that politics is first and foremost about the distinction between WE and THEY. Strauss thinks that a political order can be stable only if it is united by an external threat ... [and] he maintains that if no external threat exists, then one has to be manufactured” (Drury, 1999, p. 23). In the absence of the Soviet threat, 9/11 provided the vehicle to create a threat against an entire Muslim people, as opposed to 19 homicidal hijackers and their monetary accomplices. For the neo-Straussians, it would seem, the new THEY would play not only upon old fears of the West but their own prejudices as well.

From the time I first came to Chicago to the present day, I have seen Arabs and Muslims made the targets of unrestrained persecution, especially among the Straussians. At School, Straussian students told me that Arabs were dirty, they were animals, they were vermin. Now I read in

Straussian books and articles, in editorials and postings on websites that Arabs are violent, they are barbarous, they are enemies of civilization, they are Nazis. (Norton, 2004, pp.210–211)

The current political climate of the West and its perception of the East has, in part, created the condition of either removing or limiting Muslims' knowledge and perceptions from the public forum; the only voice we do hear tends to be the ones that play into the image of the Other. It is within this condition of oppression that the ways of knowing and the sense of self of the Muslim and/or Middle Eastern identity are being reconstructed. What can be done in the West is to resist the historic tendency to create and impose the culture, values, identity, and knowledge on Muslims and listen to what is actually being said. Perhaps by beginning to hear the significant number of Muslim voices in the West, we will establish the condition to listen to the many voices of the Muslim East. This, of course, works against the prominent narrative of Islam that suggests a fanatic, radical fundamentalist irrationalism on THEIR side and a rational, detached modern scientific perspective from OUR side. What is lost is the diversity of Muslim perspectives toward the West's own concepts of self because it does not fit with the West's construction of the Other. This is an important consideration if the desire is to move away from the simplicity of dehumanizing through stereotyping, to humanizing through individualizing counternarratives.

Multiple Responses to Western Concepts of Modernism

“Islam” represents the threat of a resurgent atavism, which suggests not only the menace of a return to the Middle Ages but the destruction of what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan calls the democratic order in the Western world. (Said, 1998)

The sentiment that domination of the Muslim East as rationalized or moralized as being the “White man's burden” to civilize “backward” people, through cool, detached scientific impartiality, has been a tool to justify and precede military aggression for quite some time: “We can now see retrospectively that during the nineteenth century both France and England preceded their occupations of portions of the Islamic East with a period in which the various scholarly means of characterizing and understanding the Orient underwent remarkable technical modernization and development” (Said, 1998). Much of the Western sentiment of the “East as uncivilized” can still be seen in comments such as Brooks's (2006) response to the large demonstrations against the Danish Prophet Muhammad cartoons and the sophomoric (as Brooks rightfully describes it) reaction by an Iranian newspaper: “Our mind-set is progressive and rational. Your mind-set is pre-Enlightenment and mythological.” Although Brooks is careful to note that he is not directing his comments toward “genuine Islamic scholars and learners,” rather to “you Islamists,” it is hard not to escape the continuous generalizations of the Western image of “good” Muslims and “bad” Muslims, an image that has drastically changed since Said's original printing of the article “Islam Through Western Eyes” in 1980, reprinted in 1998, with the “good” Muslims being Soviet-fighting Afghan Muslims and the oil-friendly Saudis. Said maintains that it is through these types of generalized caricatures that the “Islamic world is presented in such a way that makes it vulnerable to military aggression.” One of the major and enduring caricatures

of Islam is that it stands in opposition to the West's concept of modernism, postmodernism, enlightenment, positivism, and so on—as some kind of archaic, irrational, monolithic mind-set as opposed to a Muslim way of knowing that is both complex, unique, and diverse.

From Zbigniew Brzezinski's vision of “crescent of crisis” to Bernard Lewis's “return of Islam,” the picture drawn is a unanimous one. “Islam” means the end of civilization as “we” know it. Islam is antihuman, antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, antirational. (Said, 1998)

Abukhattala (2004) describes the prevalent negative imagery of Arabs or Muslims or the otherwise general Middle Easterner as the West's “new bogeyman under the bed”—given this, perhaps by demonstrating diversity in what is otherwise a monolith, may provide a better appreciation for other perspectives and interpretations. The attempt here is to demonstrate multiple responses to a Western concept of modernity in order to move away from the projection of monolithic modes of Muslim ways of knowing. However, within the diversity comes a problem: Which perspectives should be forwarded? In Euben's (1999) *Enemy in the Mirror*, in which she tackles Islamic fundamentalism and its relation to modernity, she acknowledges the problematic nature of carrying out interdisciplinary work and quotes, “Is there anyone in the room I haven't offended?” musing the hazard of becoming the Lenny Bruce of scholars. the Bruce quote also rings true for attempting to analyze Islamic or Muslim responses to being defined as antimodern or antirational, in that, Islam and those who practice it are not the simple definitions that have been provided in popular media of the West. Whose Islam, then, should be the topic of discussion? Shiite? Sunni? Sufi? Moderate? Traditional? Liberal Islam? Fundamentalist? Another perhaps? Pondering her own choices for comparative analysis, Euben writes

These are by no means the only significant voices in modern Islamic political thought, nor is this comparison the only one worth pursuing to illuminate the diversity of Islamic responses to a modernity associated with Western colonialism and imperialism. (Euben, 1997, p. 434)

Mindful of the tendency of scholars and media to focus on constructed extremes of either fundamentalists and/or secular modernizers, Nasr (2004) cautions that “after the dust settles in this tumultuous period of both Islamic and global history, it will be the voice of traditional Islam that will have a final say in the Islamic world” (p.112). Nasr also notes that with various schools of thought to consider, there are also the multiple followers of Islam, Muslims, and their distinct cultures, subcultures, and individuality to consider as well. Moreover, the consideration should also be made that just as there is a difference between Christianity and the wide scope of people who call themselves Christians, there is a difference between Islam and Muslims. This is not to discount the teachings of Muhammad through his life or the guidance of the Qur'an as the primary unifier between Muslims, but it would be irrational, the very thing the Islamic East is accused of, to believe that there is a single response to all things (although, when I discuss colonial and imperialist responses, there may be indeed a current significant growing collective perspective). In comparing Islamic responses to Western concepts of modernism, both Nasr and Euben, among others, note the Islamic modernist and fundamentalist perspectives, with Euben (2002) once again exorcising the notion of the monolithic by stating, “These perspectives emerge from different historical moments and sometimes disagree profoundly with each other” (p.26) and with Nasr (2004) noting that “until the impact of European colonialism on the heart of the

Islamic world, there were those who fought against Western rule in the extremities of the 'Abode of Islam,' but there were no Muslim modernists or fundamentalists" (p. 100). Nasr continues by documenting three reactions to the crisis of the increasing subjugation of Muslim people by foreign rule: The first was that it had occurred because they strayed from the original teachings of Islam, the second was that it marked the eschatological hadiths marking the end of the world, and the third was to respond as the European modernists and reform Islam to the modern context (pp. 102–103). From these perceptions grew modes of resistance to colonialism and imperialism that ranged from Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's (1839–1897) modernist Islamism to Ayatollah Khomeini's (1900–1989) Islamic fundamentalism. Once again, the reader must remember that these are simply some of many responses and are meant as a point of comparison and illustration and in no way meant to be definitive.

Whereas Ayatollah Khomeini's response to Western imperialism was for a unified recognition of the omniscience of God, an acknowledgment of the failings of Western claims to rationalist science, and rejection of "Westoxification," Islamic modernists, like Afghani, promoted resistance to colonialism through the unity of Muslims and acknowledgment that Islam was the true religion of reason and scientific discovery. The "knee-jerk" reaction may be to state that fundamentalist perspectives is a "turn-back-the-clock" response, and for some sects, this may be true (as it is with other religious groups), but I think the response is best elucidated by a comic an older (Iranian) cousin showed me of President Jimmy Carter and Ayatollah Khomeini playing chess: In the first panel, Ayatollah Khomeini moves a chess piece; in the second panel, President Carter smiles and moves his chess piece; in the third panel, the president's grin grows bigger and he says "checkmate;" in the final panel, the shocked president is looking at Ayatollah Khomeini as he is chewing and swallowing the president's chess piece while continuing to play *his* game. Although my cousin was by no means a fundamentalist or even a traditionalist, he kept this cartoon cut-out for years and, when I finished looking at it, asked me if I understood it. I responded, "Yes, it means Ayatollah Khomeini doesn't play by the rules." "No," he responded with grudging admiration, "it means he doesn't play by the West's rules." Here we see two different perspectives toward a concept such as modernism: On one hand, a student of Afghani, Muhammad Abduh (1845–1905), responded that there is no basis in the Western assumption of conflict between religion (Islam in particular) and the advancements associated with rational science; in fact, he argues that "Islam actually anticipate sciences such as modern astronomy and studies of the earth's resources, and prefigures much of the educational, economic and political institutions necessary for growth in the modern world" (Euben, 1997, p. 439). On the other hand, some Islamic fundamentalists argue that "the challenge of modernity is to recognize how rationalist epistemology erodes divine authority, expresses and accelerates Western power, and inhibits the establishment of a legitimate Islamic social system" (Euben, 2002, p. 34). Individuals such as Afghani and Ayatollah Khomeini, along with many other diverse perspectives, had visions of healing the Muslim Ummah they saw as being under attack, and both had different perspectives on how to meet this end. The common thread among the various perspectives is the response to the Western concept of modernism as it facilitates colonialism and imperialism and still affects the Muslim collective consciousness. Nasr (2004) notes that categories that exist with the West regarding the Muslim East usually contain a "vast spectrum of people into its fold" (p. 106) and then subsequently are branded with a term such as *fundamentalist* for purposes of demonizing. In the end, as Nasr reminds us, it

is the majority traditionalists that will have their say and to comprehend the diversity of all the responses; “it is necessary to have a context within which to place these actions” (p. 110). For most, when we speak of contextualizing experience, “imperialism frames the Indigenous experience” (Smith, 1999, p.19).

Collective Consciousness, Colonialism, and Imperialism

The Western encroachment had made politics central to the Islamic experience once more.
(Armstrong, 2002, p.152)

Imperialism, in its simplest form, is defined as the practice by which powerful nations exert control and domination over nations or people of lesser strength. Throughout history and in present times, these actions have been and are justified through a number of reasons. These may be categorized roughly as economic, such as the Marxist theory that links imperialism to capitalist motives to dominate others in order to expand the economic base, such as securing oil interests in the Middle East; political, whereby a nation's needs and security interests are argued to be best served by controlling another nation or people, such as the preemptive doctrine used by the Blair and Bush governments; and ideological aims, best described through Britain's era of colonialism in which domination was rationalized or moralized as being the “White man's burden” to civilize “backward” peoples. Put succinctly, “imperialism was the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments. Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the Indigenous populations” (Smith, 1999, p. 21). If imperialism is referred to at all in our media or classrooms, it is usually referred to today in historical terms, but for those who have experienced its actions, it is still perceived to be an ongoing subjugation. John Mohawk (1992) wrote,

Imperialism and colonialism are not something that happened decades ago or generations ago, but they are still happening now with the exploitation of people.... The kind of thing that took place long ago in which people were dispossessed from their land and forced out of subsistence economies and into market economies—those processes are still happening today.

Smith (1999) reinforces this notion by quoting “activist Bobbi Sykes, who mockingly asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, ‘What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?’” (p. 24). The effect of these principles of continued imperialism and colonialism, resulting in a feeling of helplessness and objectification, has had a profound impact on Indigenous perceptions of self, cultural identity, and knowledge. As educators and teacher researchers, we cannot ignore that these are not events that *may* have occurred in the past; rather, they continue to have current individual and global impacts. However, it is also important to comprehend the past as to its impact on the present, especially in regard to its development of both Western and Muslim collective consciousness.

Hampton (1993, 1995) writes that North American Indigenous educational issues cannot be understood without concepts of oppression, resistance, and historical analysis, and I believe that the current condition

of the Muslim voice as it relates to ways of knowing cannot be understood apart from these perspectives either. In Armstrong's (2001) chapter, "Muhammad the Enemy" (referring to the West's view of Islam, not her own), she chronicles the long and bloody history of Europe's (and its colonial children's) story with the Muslim Middle East. It is a history that has not been forgotten by Muslims (the word *Crusade* rightfully has an entirely different meaning to Muslims), but it is also a past that has not left the consciousness of the West either:

When General Allenby arrived in Jerusalem in 1917, he announced that the Crusades had been completed, and when the French arrived in Damascus their Commander marched up to Saladin's tomb in the Great Mosque and cried: "Nous revenons, Saladin!" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 40)

Current Western leaders have used the term *crusade* when discussing military conflicts/ aggression against Muslim people. From the Middle Eastern perspective, the word has deep meaning, and the knowledge of history, oppression, and resistance all becomes part of the thought processes. In Hampton's (1993) analysis, the collective consciousness of the Indigenous people of North America arose through the harsh realities of colonial oppression. The comparison between the "pan-Indian" (Cornell, 1988; Nagel, 1996) identity of North American Native people and Muslim people is worth examining given the mind-set that we have heard regarding the West's vision of its relationship with the East; as politicians and soldiers imagine playing wild west, cowboys and Indians through such statements as G.W. Bush's 2001 "I want justice ... There's an old poster out West, as I recall, that said, 'Wanted: Dead or Alive'" or the manner in which Afghanistan and Iraq are thought of by political advisers (Robert D. Kaplan), U.S. officers (Brigadier General Richard Neal), or what "Marines call, in their typically politically incorrect way, 'Indian country'" (Hess, 2005). It was through a shared sense of a collective experience, past and present, of oppression that some North American Natives began to think of themselves as "pan-Indian."

The term *pan-Indian* refers to a sense of ethnic, political, cultural, or other identity among Native American groups that crosses tribal boundaries and refers to the collectiveness that encompasses all Natives, defined as the larger-than-tribal "Indian" level of American Indian ethnicity, similar to "Black," "Latino," "Asian," or "White" (Cornell, 1988; Nagel, 1996). Rhea (1997) notes that this came about as a result of a nation or a people who had to turn "to history for a sense of Identity" (p. 8) and contends that the shared beliefs that Natives began to develop about their past acknowledged a collective memory or collective consciousness that made them a people. A Native collective consciousness implies a shared sense of experience and identity among Native people despite their tribal differences. This collective consciousness is derived, in part, from the empathetic feeling that Indigenous persons have toward one another that they both perceive as belonging to the same way of life and background and, therefore, having similar histories and intertwined fate. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) discuss this in terms of "dominant memory" that can serve to bleach the bloodstains of historical records (p.242) and, within the context of the West, justify current power blocs and their relationship to the rest of the world. As an example, they cite popular collective perceptions of Iran by North Americans and are shaped by what is allowed and not allowed to be said in the public forum:

Such power is illustrated by the American public's memory of the United States' relations with Iran. Most Americans remember only angry Iranians chanting anti-American slogans in the streets

of Tehran, a crazed Ayatollah preaching martyrdom and hostages torn away from their families. Not included in the dominant memory are images of CIA working to overthrow the government of Iranian Premier Mohammed Mossedegh in 1953 and replacing it with the “friendly” Pahlavi Dynasty represented by the young Shah. The structuring of such memories makes a difference. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 242)

For most North Americans, the “popular discourse” of Eastern/Western relations starts with “Iran is part of an axis of evil,” not “in 1998, the United States Navy ship, the USS *Vincennes*, shot down the civilian Iran Air Flight 655, killing just under 300 people, including 60 children” or “Iraq’s a threat to the free world” and not “British/U.S.-led UN sanctions have killed over half a million Iraqi children.” In Churchill’s (2003) much criticized *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*, there was no backlash to his statement of the collective “yawn” from the West over the onetime American Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s confirmation of, at the time, the death of half a million children by their own governments. Rather, the outrage came over the lack of sensitivities Churchill demonstrated over the victims of 9/11. I have brought this tragedy to the attention of my undergraduate students on a number of occasions, and the response is often one of bewilderment. One student told me, “It’s not that we don’t care, it’s just that the number is so big we can’t imagine it.” I never questioned that the half a million number is overwhelming, but I believe part of the reason why they can’t “imagine it” is that it has been purposefully left out of the Western collective consciousness. The number of Iraqi children dead has increased since 2001, and unlike the victims of 9/11, whose individual stories through the media connected so closely to our own, we have no idea of any of those Iraqi children’s stories and their families, friends, and neighbors who grieve for them.

In the months before Gulf War II, I wrote about how the aggressive actions, discourse, and purposively political and media-fueled paranoia of the East created an image of the Other as being “all dangerous” and asked, “Are we witnessing the creation of some sort of Pan-Arabism or Pan-Terrorist-Arabism in the West; a forced construction of the image of the dangerous Arab, which pays no respect to the rich linguistic, historic, cultural, political, geographic, religious and ethnic differences of these diverse people of the so called East?” (Stonebanks, 2004, p. 88). Islam has touched many different cultures, ethnicities, and nations. So whatever name someone comes up to describe it, perhaps some label that is already being used, such as “pan-Islamic” or a new one that has a wider scope, perhaps something to the effect of “Supra-Other,” it will always fall short of reflecting everyone within the group and will never do it justice to the diversity that exists within it, but there will be something that is a unifier. Of course, no Muslim is going to glibly say, something to the effect of, “Hello, I’m a Pan-Terrorist-Arab,” but there may be a response to a dominant power bloc continuously projecting and controlling the public imagery of your identity.

The fundamentalist elements of the (Middle) East are increasingly recognizing that their common problems are forcing them, sooner or later, to act as one, and the West is more than primed to see even the majority moderate in one all-encompassing broad stroke. (Stonebanks, 2004, p. 96)

Whatever the name is, although it may at first be ascribed by the power blocs, it will certainly come to represent an Indigenous collective consciousness that will remember a shared history, like over half a million

children dead and cavalier responses. Perhaps what has been in the mind of the West when imagining the Muslim-Other has begun to take shape in the mind of the East as well. The ensuing war against Iraq did not end on May 1, 2003, with the fall of the Baath party, and the ensuing violence between “the coalition of the willing” and the often termed “insurgency” or “foreign fighters,” be they portrayed in a negative or sympathetic light, lends credence to a possible growing, albeit in this case militant, pan-Islamic identity.

Iraq has also seen an influx of foreign “jihadi” fighters, most of whom have joined the Sunni Muslim insurgency. Their number is small—estimated at no more than 3,000—but their profile is high. Washington points to their presence as proof that neighbouring nations such as Iran and Syria are trying to destabilise Iraq. Organisations such as al-Qaeda meanwhile praise the foreign fighters as ideal recruits, the vanguard of a global, pan-Islamic uprising. (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2005)

Both the BBC (2005) and CNN (2005) take a conservative position on the number of “foreign fighters,” estimating there could be upwards of 1, 500 to 3,000. However, both acknowledge the ideological significance, stating that they have “little in common beyond a commitment to attack US forces or their perceived allies” (BBC, 2005). It is truly unfortunate that the bond that has been created has arisen from oppression, but it is a condition that has been played out before, for instance, with North America's 19th-century Tecumseh. It was through the collective Native knowledge of the injustices against their people that drew so many to the calling of Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwataya, the “Shawnee Prophet.” Hampton (1993) describes a 1982 Minnesota Chamber of

Commerce meeting in which various concerned Native North American Indian university students expressed their concerns over a proposed “pageant” depicting the 1892 mass hanging of 38 Sioux Indians. As the Native students individually spoke to the Chamber of Commerce, they prefaced each statement with an acknowledgment to their tribal roots, stating, for instance, “I am Lakota,” “I am Creek,” or “I am Winnebago.” When the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce asked, “What is it that all Indians have in common?” Iris Drew, the Creek, answered, “The white man” (p.288). Political writer Muna Shuqair (*The Daily Star*, November 30, 2002) draws a similar scenario when writing of a growing “supra-Arab” phenomenon:

It is a “supra-Arab” phenomenon, in the sense that it pervades all Arab countries and peoples. Driven by a need among youth for faith, their inclination toward piety and yearning for a distinctive cultural identity, this religious phenomenon has haphazardly crossed boundaries and infiltrated entire societies. Up to the present time, it does not seem that specific political movements have tapped this religious current. It has not yet been used for political gain. It is a purely faith-driven current that might have been strengthened by the West's hostility to Islam. (Shuqair, 2002, ¶ 14)

For Shuqair, the question isn't whether “supra-Arabism” exists or is growing beyond the border of Jordan, where her story takes place; it is who will take advantage of the growing collective consciousness and “lead and politicize it.” Whether the leadership that captures this growing consciousness moves it toward peaceful political change or militant resistance remains to be seen. Tragically, current news indicates spiraling

sectarian violence in Iraq (with the risk of spreading within the region), and although the Western media indicate a possible—and, in some media circles, an inevitable—civil war along Shiite and Sunni lines, voices from Iraq suggest that perhaps, like the ousting of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953, there may be outside influences at hand, a similar divide-and-conquer mentality. Haifa Zangana, Iraqi-born author and artist, recently said, “In Iraq we never had any civil war, not in the last 1, 500 years. So this is a totally novel idea.” She noted that the media are playing a decisive role in manufacturing the new confrontational labels of the Middle East, escalating the sectarian divide (Democracy Now, 2006). This creation of identity and collective consciousness, within all communities, by either significant forces or significant others, is often overlooked by teachers despite its profound impact on students’ perceptions of the Middle East and Islam.

Muslim communities continue to be dehumanized (both in the West and in the East), and if the hope is for research to benefit the group of people being researched, then given the current tragedies relating to the Muslims, there has been a failing. Through the continued consequences of colonialism and imperialism, Muslim voices have been marginalized, twisted, and ignored, creating a perception of the Muslim as less than human in the Western consciousness. For Muslim narratives to begin to enter the collective consciousness of the West, we must develop methodologies that value the knowledge of Muslims, the history, perspectives, and experiences, and be respectful of the relationship to Islam for the research to be truthful, ethical, and, in the way of the Prophet Muhammad, beneficial to the Ummah. For educator-researchers, the use of the transformative classroom is an initial space to allow Muslim counternarratives and promote Muslim ways of knowing and is the primary location to begin a peaceful resistance to an unjust master narrative. If the desire of the educator is to create learning spaces that are truly transformative, then teachers must consider themselves as researchers and move beyond the usual narratives that have been fed to them and facilitate the counternarrative. In this sense, the counternarrative is used to empower and repair group and individual damaged identities that have derived from the dominant group constructs of identities of certain people through their socially shared narratives or master narratives. In this act of noncompliance, teachers seek to foster Muslim “ways of knowing” that are both complex and diverse and to actively move away from the continuous message of Muslim perspectives as an irrational monolith as opposed to intellectual contributions that should be weighed on individual merit and balanced with the Muslim collective experience that has been severely affected by years of destructive imperial and colonial efforts. The ethical questions in one’s research continue when considering theory and methodology in relation to the Muslim knowledge.

Again, theory and methodology must be considered in relation to the Muslim experience and knowledge, specifically carrying out research that is ethical and beneficial to the Ummah. Concentrating on the idea of “objectivity” and “impartiality,” the question asked is the following: What has Western research, the researcher himself or herself, done to improve the lives of those being researched? In considering methodology, the approach of this chapter in regard to de-Westernizing knowledge is not to denounce theories and methodologies that have been initiated or reinitiated within a Western context; rather, it is to acknowledge that knowledge, like our schools, is value laden. This chapter is an invitation to all educators, Muslim or non-Muslim, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, who are interested in the use of exploring critical research to

become a part of the dialogue in creating methodologies that can reflect Muslim ways of knowing and develop humanizing voices that have been absent from the master narratives that dominate our communities and schools. It is hoped that starting this process in our classrooms that will ultimately lead to changes in our communities. The first personal step toward accomplishing this end is to identify the influences that silence Muslim perspectives and diminish their presence and ways of knowing in schools.

Within this chapter, I discussed one such element, that being the continued distortion of humanity, and questioned whether teachers are exempt from these powers of persuasion they consume, along with their students, in formal and nonformal locations of education. Once the teacher sees himself or herself as a researcher and moves beyond the passive to the active professional, then the sometimes difficult task of reflecting and accounting one's preconceptions must take place. By taking the professional responsibility of critically assessing the values being delivered through their teaching, teachers must then ask whether they consciously, unconsciously, or dysconsciously repeat or address these miseducations in their classrooms. The personal undertaking of acknowledging one's values and subjectivity within one's research must come about to position one's self within the work and give transparency and reflection to the question of "what and whose politics am I teaching in my class and to what end?" The collective experience for Muslims has been, for the most part, a witnessing of increased dehumanization—a dehumanization that is manufactured through oppression that educators can decide will either be or not be part of their classroom.

Counternarrative and the Transformative Classroom

How much is the dehumanization of Islam a part of our schools? When my wife, who is of English European descent, announced to her staffroom that she was engaged to marry me, she received some congratulations but overwhelming gasps that many of them had seen the film *Not Without My Daughter* and would never let their daughters marry an Iranian. Can anyone imagine the same response to a young teacher saying she's marrying someone of Irish descent? Would they warn her of the film *Angela's Ashes*? Of course not, because this is one perspective of the rich mosaic of voices we hear from people of Irish descent—a humanizing narrative mosaic that is lost to Islam in the West.

Often in the West Islam is depicted as a monolith, and little attention is paid to the rich diversity within both the religion and civilization of Islam. (Nasr, 2004. p. 57)

Far too few recognize the diversity of Muslims and the subtle to wide differences in which Islam is practiced or the common bond of a growing shared experience that has been created in opposition to the effects of being the Other, an experience that being half Iranian exposes you to, and it is an exposure that, *if you are open to it*, changes and/or shapes your perspective on worldviews, your relationships, your education, and even what you bring to your research. Taking artistic license from Wolcott's (1992) perspective on qualitative theory and methodology, my experience with Islam is that submission to its teaching comes in many forms, where Muslims follow this great religion on a gentle interpretive "plain" where distinguishing features are not so prominent, watersheds not so sharply divided. In the West, we are mired in perspectives that portray

Islam in singular ways and singular approaches as opposed to a religion that includes ethnic/cultural diversity that is equal to or supersedes many other religions, philosophies, or beliefs. Is it possible that Islam and the cultures associated with it are the monolith extremes that are portrayed by popular pundits or the extreme fundamentalist Muslim voices that are given consistent “airtime”? Often, the answer to the question is right in front of us but somehow does not penetrate our collective imagery. For example, while in the process of contemplating this chapter, I approached a friend, a man who is my senior, is Muslim, who is quite knowledgeable of Islam and whom I respect and told him during a social event of my challenges in writing this chapter. Immediately, he happily pulled me aside and, with his hand waving a tumbler glass full of Scotch and ice precariously close to my face, lovingly told me of the beauty of the Qur'an, the majesty of the Prophet Muhammad, and its unifying power. Like the 14th-century Iranian Sufi Hafiz, he has no problem mixing “wine with God.”

Preachers who display their piety in prayer and pulpit

behave differently when they're alone.

It puzzles me. Ask the learned ones of the assembly:

“Why do those who demand repentance do so little of it?”

It's as if they don't believe in the Day of Judgment

with all this fraud and counterfeit they do in His name.

I am the slave of the tavern-master, whose dervishes,

in needing nothing, make treasure seem like dust.

O lord, put these nouveaux-riches back on their asses

because they flaunt their mules and Turkic slaves.

O angel, say praises at the door of love's tavern, for inside they ferment the essence of Adam.

(Translation of Hafiz by Gray, 1995, p.103)

Reminiscent of Hafiz, this friend is blissfully happy with his relationship with God and also espouses that God/Allah is found within many different places. Would other Muslims agree with this perspective? Some would; some, vehemently, would not. Some, perhaps many, would say that his transgressions demonstrate he is not a true Muslim. However, the Qur'an states that each individual is answerable to God alone; therefore, it can be argued that this relationship should be left deeply personal.

We have bound each human being's destiny to his neck. On the Day of Resurrection, We shall bring out a record for each of them, which they will find spread wide open, “Read your record. Today your own soul is enough to calculate your account.” Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good;

whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear another's burden, nor do We punish until We have sent a Messenger. (17: 13–15, the Qur'an, translated by Abdul-Haleem, 2004)

During Ramadan of 2003, I asked one of my undergraduate students if she would explain to our Intercultural class at McGill University the significance of the religious observance. The young student, a very intelligent yet sometimes shy Canadian born of South Asian descent, who also chose to wear a hijab, made her way cautiously to the front of the class. As the class settled down to listen to her, she immediately composed herself and started by explaining that Ramadan was an obligation of all healthy Muslims and continued with a strict interpretation of the Holy Month that stunned most of the class with her stark description. Sensing that most of the class seemed perturbed by the lack of “holidayness” to Ramadan, I interjected that I had many friends and colleagues who described Ramadan as, yes, a time of fasting, reflection, and alms giving but also described the evening meal after fast breaking as a caring time for family and extended family to get together in a happy way. She listened politely to my description of Ramadan, nodding the whole time, and as I finished, she responded, “I know some people *celebrate* Ramadan that way” and then forcefully added with a beautiful and impish smile, “*but they are wrong.*”

Despite the collective consciousness of the Muslim community, the unifying message of the Qur'an, diversity exists within the Islamic community. For example, compare Irshad Manji's (2003) *The Trouble With Islam: A Wake-Up Call for Honesty and Change* with Asma Gull Hasan's (2005) *Why I Am a Muslim*; from the titles, we immediately read differing perspectives. Within the texts, we hear two very different narratives, two very different perspectives on Islam and its meaning to themselves and those significant others who surround them. Within their narratives, there will be experiences and positions that I, as a half-Iranian, half-European Canadian, will agree with and others I will not. Some I will be familiar with and some I will not. Both views are valid and must be heard, all the while weeding through the dialogue with an appreciation of the history and positioning that the author of the voice brings to the piece and assessing the authors' contributions to the Muslim community. Their voices are important, and it is only when we hear a great many of them can we move from the generalized stereotypes to the individual narratives that humanize. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for someone in my position to even partially suggest what should be done by Muslims residing in the East. What I can do is provide an impetus to create an atmosphere where diverse Muslim voices in the West, a significant number, can be heard, at the very least within our Western classrooms. But with this accountability comes fear for some teacher researchers.

In a new twist, student-teachers and recently graduated teachers have expressed their reluctance to include the minority voices of their students within their classroom for fear of “singling them out.” After all, one student told me, “We're told that no one is representative of their race or ethnic group.” In a misunderstanding of Freire's theory of meaningful reciprocity, young teachers await passively for the children to bring their knowledge forward and, as is typical of the context of most of our elementary and high schools, receive no meaningful dialogue. So, with an “all of my students are the same” mantra, Indigenous voices are being excluded in the classroom because of their very Indigenousness. In effect, the Indigenous child becomes the “null student,” and whatever is still disseminated comes from a top-down approach. Teachers, as Steinberg

(2004) notes, are as much a product of receiving misinformed knowledge before entering the classroom as their students and, with the passivity of considering this Western information as “objective,” repeat the same pedagogy of oppression. Said (1985) asked, “Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation” (p. 7). That “‘A’ can represent ‘B’ is now a controversial statement, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption” (Cairns, 2000, p. 15). From a current perspective and wrapped in our “post-9/11” world, it is plain to anyone who comes from “the East,” “the Arab world,” or the “Muslim world” how experts of these people within the media are usually not *of* these people, and when they are, there is always the presupposition that they are somehow not objective due to their Indigenoussness.

Teachers must begin to ask themselves, How do these experts and the research they have done to gain the title of expert benefited from the people they have studied? This by no means suggests that one has to *be* of the Indigenous group to be able to speak of it in a scholarly or exploratory way; we have too many examples of individuals who come from power blocs whose research has had a great benefit in validating the Indigenous/minority experience and educating members of the larger Western context. And they do so at a consequence:

Those Americans—Gore Vidal, Susan Sontag, Noam Chomsky amongst many others—who assert their independence from chauvinism or refuse to conform by drawing attention to some of the flawed and grim realities of the Empire are viciously denounced by the superpatriots. (Ali, 2003, p.281)

In the spirit of the Vidals, Sontags, Chomskys, and Ward Churchills of this world, teachers and researchers can be active educators of social justice and help promote their voices and ways of knowing. Within the school setting, some educational researchers and teacher-researchers may be thinking to themselves that given many of the new policy changes across Canada regarding the separation of schools and religion, classrooms are now “religion free.” This is not the case and is a reality that is often lost on Muslim scholars who bemoan the so-called radical secularism of the West. I still see many schools that teach Christmas carols to non-Christians; read C. S. Lewis's Narnia series with no critical analysis to the Christian overtones; and have Muslim and Jewish children draw Crusade-based “coats of arms” on cardboard paper shield-shaped cut-outs. This is not to say that these things should not be within our schools; the problem arises when they are taught as norms, as pure Christian-derived knowledge without context or counterperspectives.

After 9/11, many Canadian teachers put American flags in their class, as they should have in honor of a terrible day. On the day the “coalition of the willing” began their “shock and awe” bombing of Iraq, I asked my students going off to do their student-teaching practicum to contact me and let me know if any teachers decided they would honor the victims of this horror. Student teachers contacted me, but only to say their teachers acted like it was a normal day like any other; null curriculum = null humanity. Many of the classrooms the student teachers were carrying out their field experience within had Muslim students, and yet, the teachers decided to avoid or ignore the subject. Were their choices malicious in intent? I don't believe so. Although there are teachers who make the conscious choice to omit these world events from their class and teachers who unconsciously pay no attention to the plight of things that have no personal meaning to them, I believe

King's (1991) description of dysconsciousness may play a significant dynamic in the exclusion of the Other's pain:

Dyconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the *absence* of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequality accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others. (p.135)

On many occasions, I have heard from many very educated and kind people statements such as, “*They* (meaning their conception of “Middle Easterners”) just don't care about life like *we* do.” It is an example of the dysconsciousness that is repeated in the classroom, the kind of uncritical thinking that places value on life of the power bloc and uncritically dehumanizes the Other. This becomes the impetus for teacher as researcher. To move beyond the passive acceptance of power and analyze them critically, as Kincheloe (2003) urges, “critical teachers as researchers [should] understand the centrality of power in understanding everyday life, knowledge production, curriculum development, and teaching” (p. 17). From a Canadian perspective, critical teachers should ask themselves, “Why did we hold a remembrance ceremony for the victims of 9/11, but ignored the tens of thousand civilian deaths in Iraq? What played into this decision making?” Critical educators, from nursery to university, are accountable and realize teaching is not a haphazard process; our decision making has meaning to our students, and we are aware of it. Critical teachers realize that even in the supposed absence of diversity in their classroom, like Jane Elliot in the 1960s, they have a responsibility to a multicultural democracy to seek out other ways of knowing, other voices and promote identities outside of the power bloc in an authentic and humanizing manner.

I have read about some wonderful teachers who have developed rich Muslim counternarratives in their classrooms (Shah, 1996), and I have seen and heard of a lot of wonderful teachers and student teachers who do wonderful things in their classrooms as well. One student teacher, shortly after 9/11 and within a predominantly White, Christian school, decided she was going to have her students carry out their own study to research why people within the Middle East *may* dress differently than the students were accustomed to. Over a particularly hot period of time in early spring, she had half of the class wear different traditional clothing of the Middle East and the other half not. The students carried out research on the different types of clothing—their origins and cultural and/or religious significance, if any—and documented their comfort level wearing the Middle Eastern clothes and compared their responses with those of the students who dressed in their usual manner. The final outcome: Students realized the practical aspects of wearing the clothes in a hotter climate, as well as their cultural and religious significance (if any), and moved from viewing these clothing as exotic or strange to an appreciation for their use, possible meaning, and aesthetics. In light of the stereotypes that permeate the other aspects of their lives, this was a transformative experience. Another student teacher decided to do a unit on Nowruz (a commemoration of spring celebrated in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, celebrated by a wide variety of religious beliefs); when she

discovered that there was a boy of Iranian descent in her class, she asked him what he knew of the holiday. Bewildered, he responded, "Nothing." Prepared for this response, she said that before embarking on this lesson idea, she knew nothing either but would really appreciate if he could ask his family if they had anything to contribute so they could all share from their knowledge. An atmosphere of classroom dialogue was then created where information was reciprocal, and a single counternarrative of Iranian life was established within a classroom that would have otherwise never have benefited from this knowledge. Neither example is exempt from criticism, but it must be noted that they represent teachers who are taking critical curriculum risks to elicit positive change in their classrooms.

My wife Melanie is also an example I use often of the critical teacher. Within her Grade 6 social studies class, she has moved from the normative teaching of "explorers to the new world" to having her multicultural class investigate their own family's history of coming to Canada. In this model, she shares her own story and then encourages narratives from children and asks them to seek out stories from their elders on what they know about who made the journey to this country and why they did it. She has children decide who they think should be on Canadian stamps, research the individuals, and then design and present the final product. The result is a wonderful multicultural mosaic of their own Indigenous knowledge and pride. This is not to say that Melanie's personal journey to be a critical teacher has not been problematic. Coming from a power bloc background, she readily admits that the progress from being a dysconscious teacher to a critical teacher has been rough at times. Recently, in one of her projects dealing with narratives, derived from Emery, Tiseo, and Lewellyn's (2000) *Rainbow of Dreams*, she had her students find old family pictures and then seek out relatives who could tell the story behind the photo. The problem arose when her student teacher showed her a photo that a young student of Iranian descent brought to the class. The photo was of his father during his military service in the Iran/Iraq war perched on top of an antiaircraft gun. Both were unsure of the appropriateness of the image. The three of us sat down and had a pedagogical discussion of the picture, and the simple question was posed: "What would we have said if this was a picture from a Canadian of British descent who had a picture of a British uncle sitting in a bomber during World War II?" Both knew they would have unquestionably accepted it. Both then realized that they would let their student develop his family's narrative and explore the picture. In the end, what was the nature of the narrative? That his father was proud to serve his country, wear the uniform, and protect his country from a country that had declared war on it; that he had fond memories of the friends he had made; that there were many times he was scared; and, finally, that he was happy to serve with honor and then come to Canada.

Conclusion

All that has been presented thus far must seem like a daunting dilemma and task for the teacher-researcher: rethinking Islam in relation to the Western conceptualization of it, recognizing the diversity of Muslims while contextualizing experience as affecting collective consciousness, developing theory as it relates to Muslim ways of knowing, and considering the ongoing dehumanization of Islam and Muslims. In 1979, I had an elementary school teacher who I believe had every intention of moving from the dysconscious to the critical,

but the tools of creating the transformative class were unlikely part of her own professional education. Home life was consumed by the Iranian Revolution, and the anxiety that came from not knowing if I would ever see Iran or my mamanjoon again was agonizing. Report cards would say that I seemed distracted, and the teacher did her best to ask me what was wrong, but I never felt that the atmosphere of the classroom was safe enough to share what I was going through. Over time, the disconnect between what we did in school and what I knew from my own background became increasingly obvious, and like the Native students who have to endure historical accounts they know are wrong, I would either half-heartedly do the same or simply not participate. Today's teacher has a choice to be a tacit agent of reproduction or a critical teacher of transformation. Islam, Muslim students, and students from the East are subjected to continuous bombardment of negative imagery and must learn to negotiate within school systems that pay little attention to their knowledge, perspectives, or humanity. Actively critical teachers have the ability to research these dilemmas and contribute solutions that will create a classroom where a young student will be as comfortable to speak of his or her Muslim mamanjoon as other students do of their respective own. This will be the test in a decade from now; have the counternarratives that humanize begun to pierce the stereotypes that have been so detrimental to the Muslim communities?

In the fall semester of 2005, I was fortunate enough to be in a student-directed undergraduate course where students reviewed a chapter I had written in Kincheloe and Steinberg's (2004) the *Miseducation of the West* regarding the dangers of the acceptance of negative stereotypes by teachers and its impact on students; on the perceived "Eastern" or Muslim students' conception of self and/or denunciation of their ways of knowing. After giving a brief account of the main parts of the chapter, they broke out into numerous groups, and I milled around the room to listen in on their conversations as they politely pretended I was not there. In one group, the discussion leader asked, "He points out the problem, so ... *what can we do?*" Silence continued, probably in part because I was hanging overhead, and then one student looked at me and said, "What *can* we do?" We discussed the main parts of the chapter, and I encouraged them that as teachers they have the ability to be active participants in change. That I would hope they become willing participants in counteracting the negative view of Muslim people, influenced by misconceptions and misrepresentation, within the mind of the West. And finally, that as educators and teacher researchers, we have a moral obligation to provide an avenue to allow the legitimate and free narrative of Muslim ways of knowing and trust that their classroom will then create positive change in society. In effect, I told them that as critical teachers, they will have the responsibility to seek out ways of accomplishing all of this within their own classrooms. Politely they nodded, and then the question came again, "But what *can* we do?" Committed educators like examples; I like examples; so I trust this piece of writing did just that, provide first steps and clarification in the complex discussion of Muslim ways of knowing and develop methods in which the authors of this knowledge begin to be heard and humanized.

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